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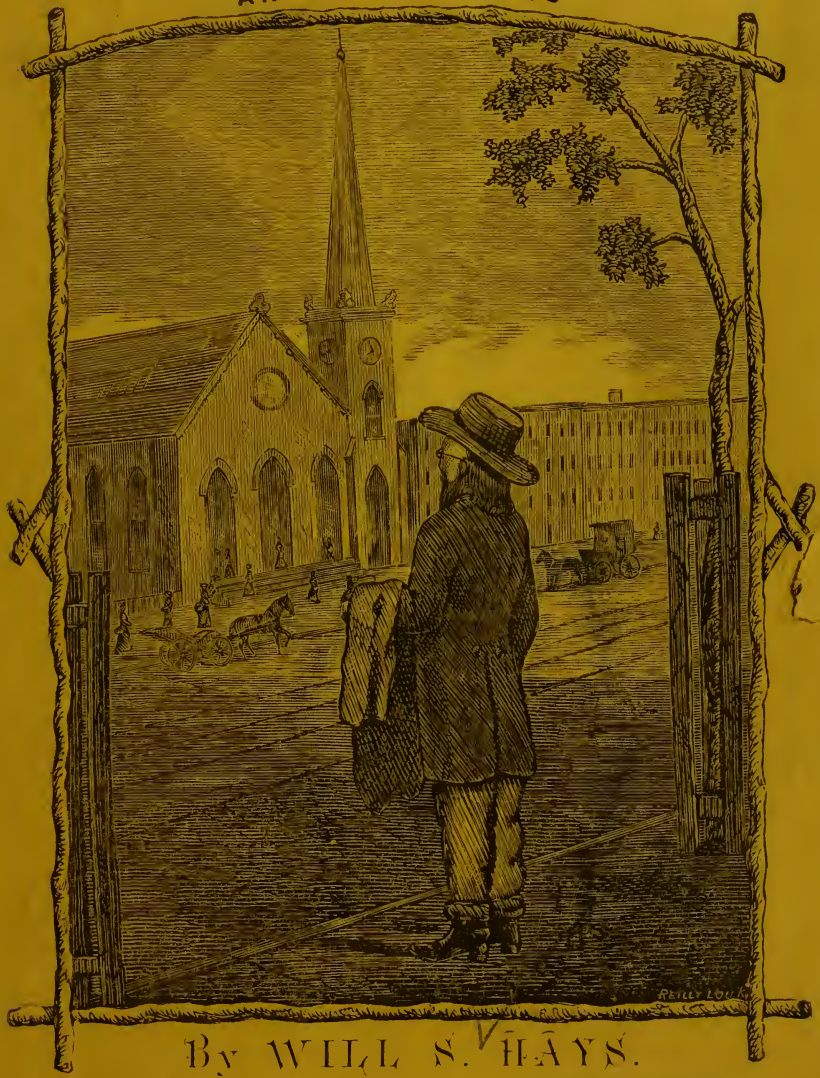
THE MODERN MEETIN HOUSE

AND OTHER POEMS



By WILL S. HAYS.

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THE

MODERN MEETIN' HOUSE

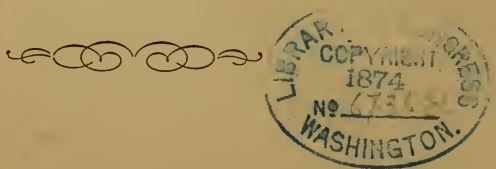
AND

OTHER POEMS;

BY

WILL S. HAYS,

Author of "Mollie Darling," "Driven from Home," "Evangeline," etc.



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TO MY FRIEND,

WALTER N. HALDEMAN,

EDITOR, MANAGER, AND GENTLEMAN, THIS LITTLE
BOOK OF POEMS
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY
THE AUTHOR.

THE MODERN MEETIN' HOUSE.

HOWDY, DAVY, light an' hitch; thar's no one home but me;
Thar ain't a man livin' sir, I'd sooner like ter see;
For Nance an' Liddy's gone to see a sick man on the hill,
An' Hiram's gone to git his grist at Jason Turner's mill.

I was in town las' Sunday, an' my heart an' me agreed
To go to meetin'—ef you'll wait I'll tell you what I seed.
The bells wor tollin' lively on the soothin' mornin' air,
An' folks wor in a hurry, like the rushin' to a fair.

The meetin' house was built ov stone, the steeple p'inted high,
The winders they wor painted all the colors ov the sky;
An' runnin' up that steeple was a great long lightnin' rod—
I kinder thought the members lacked a *confidence in God!*

The big bell sorter hushed itself an' then it rung some more,
An' people cum in carriages an' driv up tew the door;
The wimmin fixed thar dresses like they meant to make a call,
Thar faces showed they warn't a thinkin' ov *thar souls* at all.

Well, Davy, thar I stood an' tho't—'twas wicked I suppose—
Some go to church to close thar eyes an' some to eye thar clo'es;
I overheard ole Missus Swell to Missus Stebbins say,
'My darter Becky's *dress* wa'n't done—she *won't be here to-day.*'

I stood thar hesitatin' like what sort ov move to make;
I felt that I should go inside for *my* salvation's sake;
I started meekly in the house, I knowed it wa'n't no harm,
With my old *broad-brim* hat in han' an' *jeans coat* on my arm.

I went along, 'bout half-way up the velvet carpet 'ile,
The men an' wimmin *shut thar gates*, an' they begun to smile;
I seed one open jest a bit; went in an' pulled it to,
When Brown, the banker, riz an' sed, '*this ere's a rented pew.*'

I got out ov his cushin'd seat an' sot down near the door,
Expectin' for sum man tew say, '*this ere's a rented floor.*'
A fine-dressed stranger, he cum in, the members didn't wait,
But every feller jumped at him an' *opened wide his gate.*'

The parson riz an' raised his han's, with cold an' haughty air,
An' everybody in the house stood up an' heard his prayer.
I don't know how it is with *them*—somehow *I* always feel
I'm doin' God injustice when I gits too proud to kneel.

Then all sot down an' stared about, then at the parson's face,
When he put on his specs an' sed, 'Let's sing Amazin' Grace.'
An organ busted loose up-stars—the music hit was gay;
Hit tickled them as couldn't sing, an' them wot hed to pay.

The music quit, the parson riz—they passed the hats 'roun' next,
An' when the deekins sot them down, the parson tuck his text.
He preached about two hours 'bout the Faith in God to keep;
The wimmin folks sot noddin' while thar husban's wor asleep.

One gal sed to another, 'Hev you seed my bow to-day?'
She'd nod her hed an' then say back, 'The ball las' night was gay.'
One whispered loud enough behind her fan fur me to hear,
'That bonnet Sofy Tag's got on is one she hed last year.'

The parson quit and then sot down—the orgin played agin;
I tho't ef that was servin' God, the tunes they played was thin;
I've hearn the bands at circuses jest play the self-same air.
The parson, when the orgin quit, dismissed 'em all with prayer.

Now, Davy, ef the angels seed what I did, I believe
Thar warn't a one, among 'em all, but what laffed in thar sleeve;
For God don't smile on Christians who his blessin's will abuse;
He hain't no use for orgins, an' He don't like rented pews.

He rings no bells to tell 'em that the Sabbath's come once more—
The angels have no carridges to drive up to His door.

Such Christians might as well look up to God, an' sweetly smile
An' say, 'I send my soul, dear Lord; I'm coming arter while.'

Our Master up in Heaven, Davy, sees—hears everything;
He likes to see His children kneel, an' loves to hear 'em sing,
For whar He lives the angels sing, an' Christians git their dues.
His music costs Him nothin,' an' He has no rented pews.

Thar ain't no use o' foolin' 'long the road down to the grave;
Thar is no use o' dodgin' when you've got your soul to save,
Fine churches, orgins, carridges, clothes, rented pews, an' pelf;
Don't count that day—it lays between yer Maker an' yerself.

BILL WILKINS' FALL.

SAY, Nance, jes chunk the fire thar, an' let us have some light,
An' quit yer knittin'; we will set and talk awhile to-night.
I'll do all the talkin' ef you'll hear what I've to say;
It's what I hearn, while I was down to Parker's sale to-day.

Don't you remember Andy Rhodes that lived thar near the lane.
That tuck us to the meetin' house—his oldest darter, Jane?
She always led the singin' in the church an' Sunday-school,
An' cum anigh to marryin' once a city chap named Poole.

Jane always hed a smilin' face, her heart was kind and good.
She was the sweetest girl that lived in all the naberhood;
An' everybody thought the happiest moment ov her life
Was when Bill Wilkins cum along an' tuck her fur his wife.

Bill larned to be a blacksmith with old honest John McGlade,
Who died with yaller fever jest as Bill had larned his trade.
So he kept up the blacksmith shop, an' worked with might an' main
An' made an honest livin', which supported him an' Jane.

Thar home it was a happy one with everything in store.
To keep off want an' trouble from a-knockin' at thar door;
Thar happy lives had never been o'ershadowed by distress—
Yes! they were both contented in the sunshine of success.

"BESIDE THE DYIN' EMBERS SOT A WOMAN THINLY DRESSED,"

Ah! Nance, how strange an' true it is, the heart is not content;
How few appreciate the gifts that God to us has sent—
Jest when they think that all they want is laid down at thar door,
They won t let 'well enough alone,' but make a grab for more.

Jane tuck her baby off to town, a little while to stay,
But what a change cum over her before she got away;
For pride had entered in her heart; she saw no reason why
That she should be a blacksmith's wife, secluded live an' die.

She saw the wimmin robed in Fashion, walkin' down Fourth Street,
An' Folly an' Extravagance so very often meet;
Her eyes had seen enough to make her bosom fairly thrill
With vanity, while she forgot the priceless love of Bill.

She saw how other wimmin lived, an' how they were attired,
How others rid in carridges, an' how by men admired;
While her fair face an' faultless form dressed up in plainer goods—
Her life be spent in livin' with a blacksmith in the woods.

A year went by, the shop was closed, an' Bill was forced to roam,
For discontent an' foolish pride hed robbed him ov his home.
'Tis true he hed some money saved, an' Jane kept hollerin' 'give.'
An' with his wife an' little one, they went to town to live.

Poor Jane! that once true heart, now got to be as cold as stone,
The soft embrace, an' lovin' smile, alas! for Bill had flown.
An' when he saw his little one run playful to his knee,
His heart give way, he wept an' thought, 'what will become ov me?'

The hour hed cum—'twas but a year—they tried Jane's foolish plan
An' in that little space of time Bill was a ruined man.
His wife spent all in foolish dress, an' never stopped to think
That Bill's poor heart was breakin', so he tuck to awful drink.

Deserted by her 'city friends,' whose friendship did not check
Till Folly an' Extravagance had made of her a wreck.
Her love of dress had led her whar her husban's money went,
She proud, him poor—turn'd in the street—the landlord wanted
rent.

Do you remember, Nance, one night about a month or so,
When I went walkin' down the lane, in all that sleet an' snow?
Well, goin' along, I spied a light—I looked in through the pane,
I seed a sight I hope that I will never see again.

Before the dyin' embers sot a woman thinly dressed,
An' she was sobbin' o'er a child she held close to her breast,
An' layin' off a little piece, on straw upon the floor,
A man was drunk; I never seed a sight like that before.

Oh! when I saw that wretched soul lift up her tearful eyes,
It nearly broke my poor old heart to hear her sobs an' cries;
The man looked up, I saw his face—'Great God! what do I see?'
'*Bill Wilkins, why this sufferin' here?*' '*Ask her; Oh! don't ask me!*'

You know the rest; you've seed the grave beneath the hawthorne shade;
The widow and her little child weep whar *a drunkard's laid.*
Now, let us kneel an' thank the Lord that 'mid life's checkered scenes,
We've always been contented, for we've lived within our means.

THEN AND NOW.

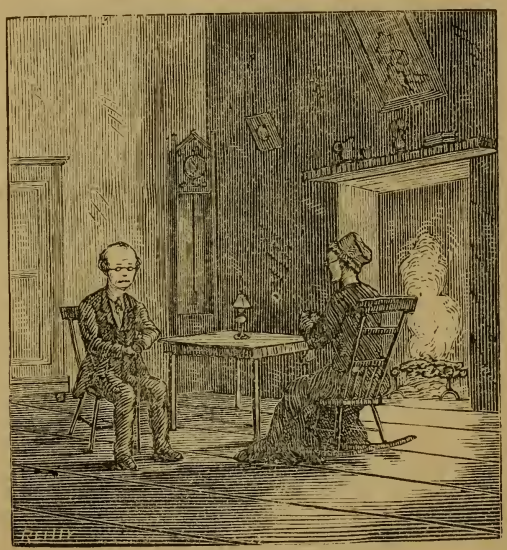
AH, Nance, I know that you hev been a good an' honest wife,
An' we are now a slidin' down the slippery side ov life;
The journey from the cradle tew the grave is not so slow
To them as old as me an' you, an' hain't got fur to go.

It doesn't seem as ef 'twas more than jes' the tuther day
Since you an' me seed Sandy Brown put in his bed o' clay;
An' I wor jest a thinkin' it is five-an'-twenty year
This comin' May that he was follered tew the churchyard near.

He was an honest, upright man—a Christian true an' good.
His sudden death brought sorrow all throughout the naberhood.
He left a wife an' little child thar losses to regret;
The child's a good an' useful man, an' she's a widder yet.

Sweet May, fond mother of the flowers, put on a pleasant face
That mornin' at the meetin' house the funeral tuck place.
The little one-horse country hearse was backed up to the door,
To lead the train ov mourners after him that was no more.

It seemed to me as ef sweet nature sot that day aside,
For all the merry songs ov birds upon the air hed died:
The flowers blushed an' hung thar heds, the winds was soft an' low,
As down the lane the funeral train with mournful steps did go.



"OH, NANCE, I KNOW THAT YOU HEV BEEN A GOOD AN' FAITHFUL WIFE."

They entered in the quiet little 'City ov the Dead,'
The parson raised his han's an' eyes, while each one bowed his head.
An' as he prayed the little crowd that stood around the bier
Give all they had on airth to give—sweet memory's partin' tear.

They sung that soul-inspirin' hymn—Nance, yew hev hearn it too—
'Here, Lord, I give myself to Thee; 'tis all that I can do.'
An' then the parson preached a bit, an' after that did pray;
The corpse was then put down into its tenement of clay.

The crowd dispersed, the sleeper slept, his pilgrimage was o'er,
His soul had winged its wayward flight, to live forevermore,
An' in *The Book* an angel rit in golden letters down
Among the chosen ones of God, the name of Sandy Brown.

I cum by thar the other day an' seed poor Sandy's grave,
No monument yet marks the spot except what heaven gave,
An' that is lots of roses scattered on a coat ov sod—
The *soul*, an' not the *monument*, is all that pleases God.

Ah! Nance, 'twas Sunday week ago, a pleasant hour to fill,
I went with Uncle Hiram on a visit tew Cave Hill;
He tuck me in his buggy, an' we driv aroun' it slow—
It's built outside the city, jest about a mile or so.

Its windin' walks an' level paths, its flowers rich an' rare,
Are beautiful to look upon. An' Nance, while we was there,
In lookin' at the monuments, good Uncle Hiram sed,
'The finest in the place belongs to men who are not dead.'

I thought from the inscription that on some ov them they make,
The one who sleeps beneath them must hev made a big mistake,
An' got into sum uther grave, or tried the 'dodgin'' plan;
But God don't mind thar *monuments*—He settles with the *man*.

While thar I seed a funeral a comin' to the groun's;
It wasn't nuthin' like the one I seed ov Sandy Brown's;
A big brass band in uniform was playin' some sad air,
An' follerin' them a lot ov men, that reached about a square.

With steady tread they marched along towards the silent vault;
The hearse came next, an' then the hacks, an' all o' them did halt.
The music stopped; the crowd assembled 'round the lonely bier,
An' *only* them who *knew* deceased did sigh or weep a tear.

A silent prayer, an' all was done, they then retraced thar tracks,
An' them who *never knew deceased*, found cosy seats in hacks;
So back to town they hurried flew, away from sweet Cave Hill,
Not thinkin' ov the widder once who hed to pay the bill.

I've often thought ef many a corpse could stop the hacks an' see
Who were these 'friends an' 'quaintances' that rid behind so free,
Whose widow had to pay for hacks—how many nervous shocks
He'd cause in that procession by attackin' it with rocks.

The band got out into the road an' started for the town,
A playin' tunes like 'Pat Malloy,' an' 'Valk dot Proadway down,'
The long procession follerin' up until they come to halt,
An' not a one thought ov the corpse they left out in the vault.

Ah! Nance, it's got to be too common in these wicked days
To speak of everybody as 'None named him but to praise.'
I'd rather hev God's favor, be a Christian an' be poor,
Than to try to buy His favors an' keep loafin' 'round His door.

As I was tellin' Hiram, how the people are too fast,
I don't care how or when they start, Death catches 'em at last.
The rich alone don't git to Heaven, the poor go thar as well,
For money often serves to pave the shortest road to Hell.

Well, Nance, I'll tell you what's a fac, the Lord is good to us,
Let's you an' me be good in Him, an' in Him put our trust.
We'll pray to Him—that He will make our pathway one of flowers
Ef white-washed Christians go to Hell, it's no consarn of ours.

THE NEW MAGDALEN.

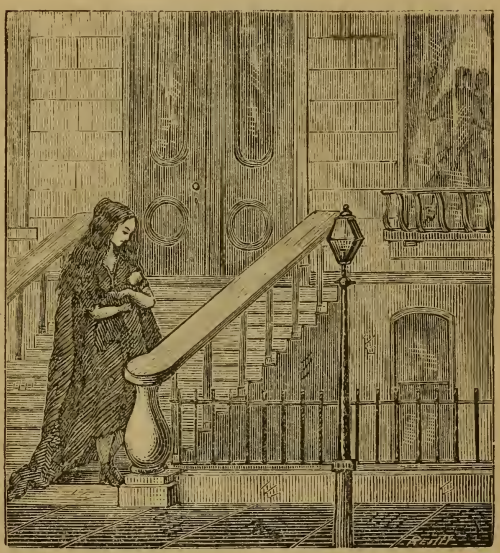
"NEITHER DO I CONDEMN THEE. GO, SIN NO MORE."

WE met and smiled, and met again,
Smile greeted smile upon the street;
His form and face it seemed to me
To be my fault—my fate to meet.
He spake, and took my hand in his
And pressed it; why? I could not tell;
I loved him; I believed him true;
I listened, and—*I fell.*

He spurns me now, and I have lost
All that was dear to me in life.
They call me "woman of the town"—
I, who should be his faithful wife.
He shuns me—hates me. Those I knew
Before I drank the cup of grief
Abhor me now, but smile upon
The coward and the thief.

He lives, and moves in circles, where
They seem with pride to call his name;
But all the wealth the world commands
Can never free his soul from shame.
He said "He loved me," and it was
The happiest moment of my life;
But now I'm scorned, because I'm called
His woman—not his wife.

He wronged me; and this little child,
I fold so loving to my breast,
May never live to know the shame.
He knows 'tis his—God knows the rest.
Though he should live an hundred years
And roam about—I do not care,
On land or sea, 'wake or asleep—
Guilt follows everywhere.



"HE WRONGED ME; AND THIS LITTLE CHILD I FOLD SO LOVING TO MY BREAST."

O woman! woman, why thus hate
One of your sex? Why not implore
The God of mercy to forgive?
Did he not say: "Go, sin no more"?
'Tis woman's hate to womankind
That makes our lives a wretched span.
Since you will scorn a woman so,
Oh! why forgive a man?

I dare not go into your church
And kneel with you in solemn prayer,
And ask God's pardon for my sin;
For women scorn me out of there.
And, if the thief of virtue sat
Beside his sister, I've no doubt
He would be first to leave his pew—
To come and drive me out.

'Tis human nature oft to err,
And sweet forgiveness is divine.
Ah! where's the Christian woman who
Would speak to troubled hearts like mine?
Who comes to talk of Christian love,
To one whose heart and soul's defiled?
Not one among you! God forgive
A mother and her child.

Ye angels holy, pure and good,
Go to our Father—He yet lives—
And tell Him not to scorn me too,
Though women hate me—He forgives.
Teach, O! teach them to forget,
And let Forgiveness with them dwell,
That they may show lost souls the way
To heaven—not to hell.

WOMEN VS. WHISKY.

[Matthew, 6th chapter, 5th, 6th and 7th verses.]

WELL, Jedge, cum in. Why, bless yer soul, I'm really glad ye've come.
But Nance went out a while ago to see a neighbor home.
Set down an' make yerself at ease—it ain't more nor a mile—
Give me yer hat an' overcoat—she'll be here arter-a-while.

I red the COURIER-JOURNAL, Jedge; I seed in it to-day
Whar wimmen folks war goin' about the whisky shops ter pray.
They sing a song an' pray a prayer, an' try ter drive a wedge
By askin' men to shet thar shops and sign thar temperince pledge.

It looks like sorter crowdin' things, an' Jedge, the fac' is, here,
That wimmin overleap the mark an' git out ov thar sphere.
When Christian ladies hev to go to whisky shops ter pray,
It looks like wastin' words on men, an' throwin' time away.

The cause may be a good one, Jedge; the wimmin may be right;
As long as rye an' corn is raised men will git drunk an' fight.
The only way to stop it, sir, as sure as you are born,
Jes' let the farmer plant more wheat, an' less o' rye an' corn.

Ef wimmin want to do good works, jes' let 'em frame a law,
An' let the legislator chaps bring whisky men to taw.
By stoppin' men from makin' it they'd soon hev none ter sell.
Then many a man would git a taste ov heaven instid ov hell.

Ah! Jedge, I'd like ter know one thing—what good kin wimmin do,
When men that make it go to church an' Christian lives pursue
They'll pray thar prayers an' sing thar songs, an' when the Sunday's o'er,
They'll make an' sell thar whiskey, sir, an' kill 'em by the score.

"I'LL BET YOU'LL FIND NO FASHION, NOR A DRAP OF WHISKY THAR."

Let lovely wimmin meet alone in holy places whar
They'll feel an' know the Lord will hear thar every song and prayer.
An' not go round to whisky shops whar Satan's children roam,
Sich laugh an' swar, an' drink an' say: "You'd better be at home."

Now, Jedge, ef wimmen want to see these whisky-drinkers roam
In paths of sober manliness, let 'em begin at home.
A gentle word, a look or deed, to "loved ones" who are thar,
May do more good to save a man than they could do with prayer.

When husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, begin to run at night,
They must see things *away from home* more pleasin' to thar sight.
Man loves *his home*, his family, too, an' few would ever roam
Away from both an' "take to drink" ef all was *right* at home.

I tell you, Jedge, thar's many a man who, ef he'd stop an' think
Of wife an' children, home and friends, would never take a drink.
How many, too, are drunkards now that know, alas, too well
The *first drink* was the one that was the startin' p'int to hell.

Ef young men cum to see yer girls, or happen in to dine,
Ah! don't forgit to offer 'em a social glass o' wine.
Then wait till he's yer son-in-law, an' he has fallen low,
And tell yer darter in her shame—'Aha! I told you so!'

Ef wimmin want to do good work—(how few ov them that would)—
I'll tell 'em how and whar to go to do a power o' good;
Jes' drap this whisky business now an' git around the doors,
An' sing an' pray an' try to close all sorts of fashion stores.

Make raids on places whar they sell false har an' corsicks, too,
Whar bonnets ar so high in price—they git the high-heel shoe—
Go sing an' pray to dry-goods men, with tear-drops in each eye,
An' tell 'em that yer husban's say thar prices ar too high.

Young ladies, git these dress-makers to sign that pledge o' yours,
That they'll no longer curse you all—tell them to close thar doors.
Go, learn to cook, to wash, to iron; prepare yerself in life,
Jes' like yer poor old mother did—you'll be some good man's wife.

Now, Jedge, it's jes' as fair to see men kneelin' 'round the door,
An' prayin' loud to him that keeps the hour-glass corsick store.
Fur he sells things that kills a girl the airly part ov life,
She marries—dies—an' some poor man has parted with his wife.

Go, all ye wimmin, in a crowd, an' loudly sing an' pray,
That fashion spread her pinions an' with whisky fly away,
An' never cum agin to airth to curse the race again,
For fashion murders wimmin while the whisky kills the men.

Go, see the graves in old Cave Hill, an' count 'em every one.
An' thar you'll see the busy work that hollow fashion's done.
An' thar, too, lie the forms ov men that whisky put to sleep.
O, man! O, woman! 'tis enough to make the angels weep.

Ah! Jedge, one word—it must please God, I know, whene'er he sees
A Christian father offerin' prayer to Him on bended knees.
His wife an' family kneelin' too, an' all engaged in prayer.
I'll bet you'll find no fashion nor a drap ov whisky thar!

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